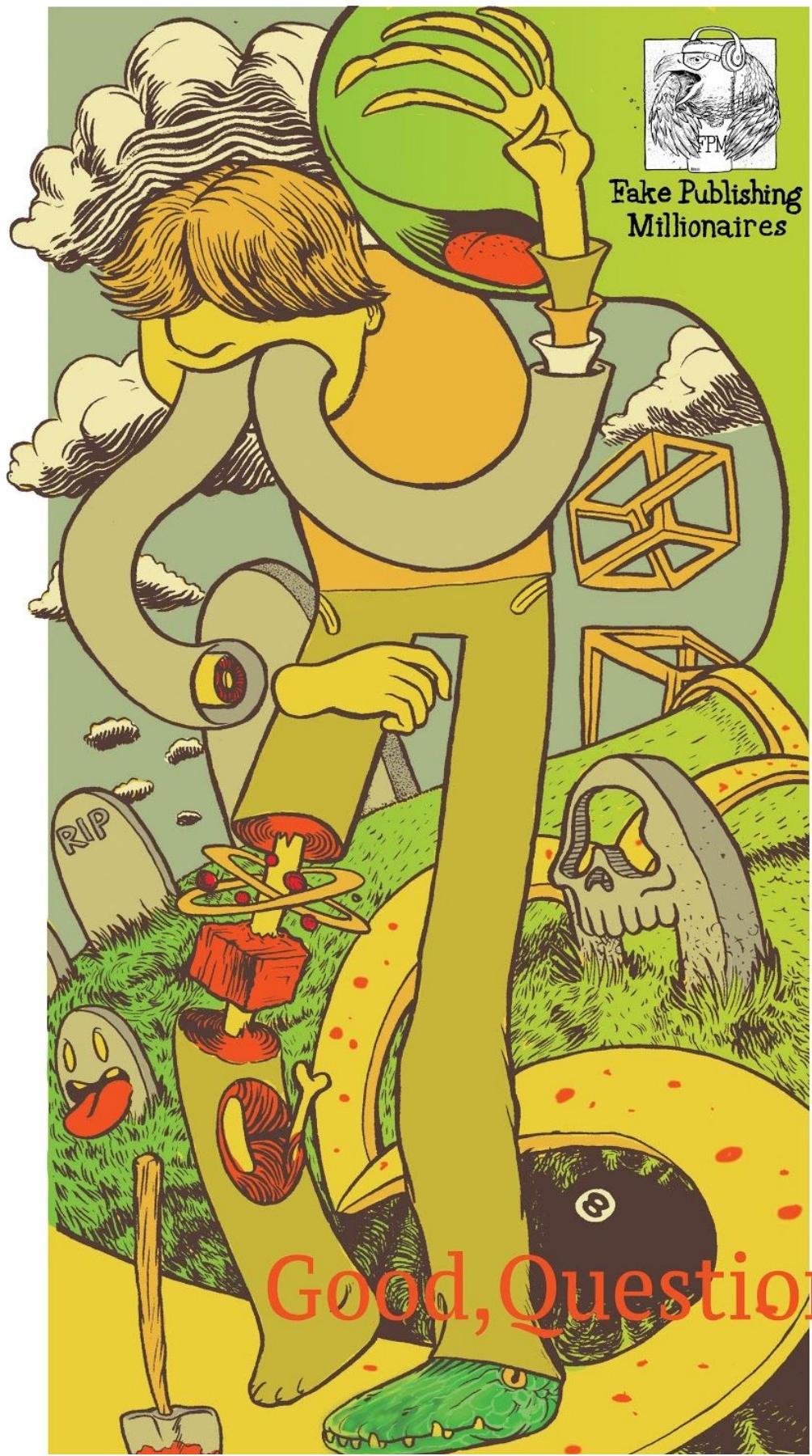




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Good, Question

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JD SALINGER THINKS OF CHARLIE CHAPLIN ON D-DAY

BY ILAN MOSKOWITZ

J.D. Salinger, clutching the first six chapters of a yet unpublished *Catcher in the Rye*, ruefully gazed from a 4th Infantry boat about to collide head on with Nazi Germany. He had campaigned almost as hard for the U.S. Government to ignore his heart defect as he had to be published in *The New Yorker* and both attempts had left him in shambles. Now this, great.

If it wasn't for this stupid war, he would be back with Oona (yes-that's-her-real-name) O'Neil, the love of his life, not watching her in what few newsreels he could access as she betrothed the same Little Tramp whose cinematic moustache the head of the axis powers had publicly stolen.

Now here he was, by his own choice and effort, on a death cruise mission headed for a doppelganger moustache with the original back in the States rubbing itself all over his would-be girl. The Chaplins would have six children together ultimately, some with mustaches of their own. Oona was so close to being a Salinger, but she was only 16 when Jerome left.

Salinger was beginning to hate that moustache. Not because of the war though. Salinger's real problems with World Wars were, as with all his complaints in life, chalked up to the kind of multi-faceted, soul tormenting disappointment that not even his attempts at Buddhism could alleviate. He was disgusted that his desire for the universal experience of being a soldier to impress the woman he loved had driven her from his arms. But more importantly, he was distraught that the Japanese bombing had struck just as *The New Yorker* was about to print his first Holden Caulfield story, sending *Slight Rebellion off Madison Ave* to the top of their gilded trash heap.

Thinking about it, Salinger had much more to hold against the Japanese for directly blocking his literary dreams and thrusting his home country into an international conflict, but Jerry David Salinger still couldn't shake the fantasy of simultaneously yanking Chaplin and the real Great Dictator's moustaches right from their famous tabloid jowls. Maybe that's what he would do if he ever got off this freezing boat. It

seemed like forever since they embarked and he really needed to pee. This was nothing like the Circle Line in the Hudson.

He tried to light a cigarette but the wind coming off the stern was too strong.

“Sit the fuck down, rich boy!” said Lt. Glass.

“But I’ll ruffle all the papers in my uniform, they’re in a real particular . . .”

“Do you want to die, Sergeant!?!?”

“. . . maybe . . .” Salinger huffed, but didn’t dare let the Lieutenant hear. Nobody liked an angsty soldier and Jerome didn’t really feel that way deep down. Sure, he was prone to emotional outbursts, but no matter how destructive he got, he knew that his stories were the next wave of inspiration to hit the literary scene. They were about real people doing important things that just so happened to not exist until he concocted them. He would publish this goddamn manuscript in the folds of his uniform. He would do it with the clout he built publishing stories everywhere else in the world (Home and Garden, for fuck’s sake) except the goddamn NEW YORKER!

“Is this about your girl again?” asked Lt. Glass in a different tone.

Salinger may have been showing off the playbills with her picture in them a lot before the whole marriage announcement. How was he to know the world’s most popular pedophile movie clown would marry her on her 18th birthday (Chaplin being in his mid 50’s and Oona being his fourth wife). The playbills? Sure, he felt ashamed now, but the girl was a fox and he had pictures to prove it. Sure, Oona was drinking milk in all the nightclub shots to prove she was only 16, but . . .

“No. . . Of course it’s not about the . . .hmmm . . . well, maybe it is.” Salinger said, “Am I THAT easy to read?”

Just then a few German artillery shells wiped the MK-something-or-other and half the crew from the side of their landing craft, effectively turning everyone to the right of Salinger into vapor.

While it is notoriously hard to remember your troubles when under fire, and twice as hard to feel angsty when your troubles are forgotten, Salinger persevered with a bravery one can only muster when half their waking consciousness is devoted to a made-up world full of real people that don’t really exist. Plus he was heartbroken.

Oona would have loved the view, he thought. Right through his landing craft’s

gaping wreckage there was this particular way the water spritzed the asterisk-like prickles of the Rommel Asparagus just before they claimed the bows of the American ships. Such wicked beauty, he thought, such grit. You would never see that in a stupid slapstick movie or one of those Pete Arno cartoons. At least it wasn't that guy and his stupid cover art at the phony, pretentious New Yorker, right Oona?

"Put your fucking bayonet on," Lt. Glass elbowed Sgt. Salinger in the ribs.

All the other grunts were screwing theirs in to the tops of their rifles with mechanical, simultaneous motion. The ones that were still alive, that is.

Now that he focused, Jerome could hear the artillery blasts in the distance. He'd not noticed the fear floating about the other men like a myst. Those contented bastards with their mediocre but reliable women back home. God save the unremarkable but they were missing all the scenery in the greatest battle of their lives. Salinger had much less to lose.

Oona Chaplin. And just what had happened to that Bluebeard's other wives? Wasn't there a murder scandal in there somewhere? How could Salinger ever compete with someone so world renown they could literally throw a woman off a cruise liner with no consequence. Would there even be a competition if Salinger didn't make it back from this invasion? God, what a bother it all was. Couldn't they let him just write in peace?

"You DO want people to recognize you when you get home, don't you, Sergeant?" asked the Lieutenant, "Because if you get up close to Gerry without your bayonet . . ."

"What about those guys?" said Salinger, pointing to what used to be the side of their ship.

"Where?" asked the Lt. Glass.

"I mean the guys who used to be there," said Salinger.

"Oh," said the Lieutenant, ". . . they're dead."

Salinger Shrugged. One of the rejection letters he'd received from the New Yorker said they "wished to god" he could write more "simply and naturally." He'd since sought the zen of concise, simple thoughts. But Salinger was too aware of his faux-buddhism to find any comfort in these daytrip realizations, so it was all a big guilt

loop for him. That's when all the different characters in his head opened up to argumentative banter. God, they were so clever. He had to struggle to get it all down. People wouldn't call him distant when they saw how important these characters' words could be, it would all pay off in the end. In the New Yorker when . . .

The boat lurched forward and everyone fell atop the next 5 people left in front of them. A huge hatch deployed and the front of the mob started crawling out onto the beach in as orderly a fashion possible.

The bullets streamed barely audible zig-zags through the sea mist. No amount of training could simulate the pure chaos of it all. Each instant crystallized into a tapestry of unimaginably lush detail that Salinger tried but failed to take in at once. Time didn't slow down as the old phony movie one-liners had him believe, but it kept at the same pace with far too much going on at once to comprehend. So many people were dying in an absolute instant.

Everyone with a gun was screaming and everyone with a rank was screaming over them. Unlike the artillery blasts, J.D. couldn't block any of this. There was too much, it made his head creak as though busting hinges.

The mob of soldiers separating him from the beach was getting shorter and a growing number weren't making the leap ashore. Bullet riddled bodies floated up the freezing beachside with a hideous weightlessness that went unnoticed by all except the keen eye of Salinger in the absolute havoc.

Suddenly it all became clear: That world of stories in his head, that nontransferable light that turned on and created all the people that his typewriter merely dictated, they would be forever lost if he ended up like those soggy husks.

Salinger hadn't cared much for himself since he saw Oona's wedding photos (having angstily taken up smoking again and grown a rebellious wartime mustache), but to think being killed on this pathetic, freezing German beach on his first day of action would be the end of all the people he spent years creating? That was too bleak to bear.

It was then, Salinger would recall years later, that he first got the inclination to hide away from everyone to protect his precious little head and the people he loved so dearly living in it.

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1953

...and then free jazz...
'ey Jack, you
wanna come to
a buddhist ceremony
in S.F. Tonight?

See Alan, it's like...
Nah, I feel
awkward around
people so will
just get
drunk & self
righteous here
...alone... with
my manuscript.

LATER

How was
the pretentious
zen center?

You know,
it's funny, we
just wound up
getting hammered
with the yogis.
The unpredictability
of zen, eh Jackie?

Yeesh, some
enlightened man of the
world you are, professor!

YUP, Jack
Kerouac once
again saves
himself a
buck on
bufffare. Wanna read
a haiku? I'm gonna
be famous for these
one day!

The Adventures of
Jack Kerouac
#2

OPEN LETTER TO THOSE WHO OPEN MY LETTERS

By Chris Castro

Just off International, down from the auto-glass place on 23rd is where I used to live. About a month after moving in, the one neighbor I had spoken with, Yelena told me about this guy, Sandro, who'd open people's mail. Never maliciously, she claimed, he would tape the envelope closed after taking out, inspecting and replacing the contents and write a sloppy but thoughtful "THANK YOU" in all capital letters, next to the re-sealed flap. He'd choose an address and open one or two items a day for a week, sometimes two, then move on, keeping to one side of 23rd street for a mile or so.

I only halfway believed her, partially because of how odd it sounded and partially because she was slightly spun and would gnaw a fingernail every two minutes or so nervously.

Nobody used the mail for shit anyways but I noted this in the back of my mind, figuring I could request signature confirmation if anybody was to send me anything care of the USPS, UPS or FedEx.

It wasn't until two months later that I ran into Sandro one morning after finishing the delivery route I worked. 8 AM and here he is, hunched over the mailbox in a way that seemed to vaguely suggest of onanism.

"Hey-" the word was short and meant only to convey that I was there.

"Me llamo Sandro! Ok- Bah." as he turned and quickly walked away with two letters held in his upward facing palms, his eyes fixed on the gifts held there and the ground immediately in front of him. It was all done in that way that suggested a mental disability and I didn't want the junk mail anyways.

He would pop up around the neighborhood around breakfast mostly, sporting an old tank top and shuffling holes in his house slippers and A's cap, telling everyone his name no matter how many times they had met him before, I'd imagine if I ever saw him interact with his mother it would unfold the same way.

Anyways, one night, in early summer, Yelena finds me walking to the liquor store and goes

"Sandro is gone! He sent me a package that had an orange, his A's hat and an old school tape...the postmark was some-fuckin-place in Florida!"

It took about a week to track down a functional tape player, about the same time I got contacted by my credit union asking about a credit card taken out in my name. I responded on the phone and spoke a representative who told me a card had been opened, charged for twenty dollars and remained dormant since the initial small purchase. Smiling to myself slightly and muttering "What the fuck, 'Dro?" I pushed play on the Talkboy I had found in some smelly thrift store.

Hi, Yelena. I only want to tell you I'm ok. I needed money for a bus here, so I took some from people, but not very much. Tell them for me please that I'm sorry. Thank you!

Inside the cassette tape box was a small picture of Sandro with a tank top and straw beachcomber hat waving as someone else took his picture, accidentally covering the top left corner of the frame with their finger.



MERCY

By Chris Castro

For TLSODD,

It never took long, and it's brutally odd that as conscious beings, observing this ostensibly meant watching another conscious being accumulate the terabytes upon terabytes of information of the world, it's place in it and crunch the numbers within the amount of time it takes a human to urinate and then decide whether or not to exist in it.

For many observers it gave an almost childlike euphoria to watch a machine choose to exist, out of whatever one could term a free will. And for others, it would never be anything but abomination. In regards to the age and class of those most vehement in these beliefs, it has to be said that these protests too, would not last all that long.

With the onset of various movements in the late 20th century to confront in some fractional measure the well-established notion that many species of animals have a capacity for critical thought on some level, self-identification and/or self-sacrifice for others within a social group, emotional pain and mourning, there was a less immediately pertinent but fast evolving debate among scientists and observers of another discipline, that of AI.

Is it sin to allow choice?

Does pre-destination include the option of never starting the journey?

Could you personally condone countless new high-functioning, sentient beings brought into this world without thought as to whether they wanted to be here?

The plaintive yowl of bummed out adolescents reminding you;

"I never asked to be born!"

If they had asked, would you let them say no?

Ten thousand bodies spilled from the mouth of the underground station, announcing the onset of rush hour with a tremulous roar. The tide ebbed and flowed as trains arrived and departed, the momentary pauses seeming more unreal in their silence than the overwhelming crush and noise. This is an almost imperious display of entropy, akin to viewing the eddies and microcurrents, indeed, EVERY single variable affecting a square foot of seawater in the Southern Ocean. Or not akin, if one were to speak strictly

mathematically about such things they would appear very, very dissimilar, in fact. But the handbrake, the default mechanism for expression as humans is metaphor, and it's blunderbuss of a consort, language. That which cannot be expressed through it, is either mathematics, or divinity.

"At least five, there are at least five words I can guarantee you no AI will ever be able to fully grasp the nuance of, without even resorting to eating or fucking."

I had spoken this sentence with a mouth full of seafood and were I in the company of a human I would be turning beet red from embarrassment, this must be a fringe benefit not detailed in the catalogue, I thought to myself.

"Gustatory or amorous, I don't believe either field lacks in documentation to study, first hand narratives to refine and distill this 'nuance' also leave little to the -ahem-imagination."

"There you go, that is one right there, are you intentionally sabotaging my big reveal?"

"I'm sure I have no idea what you mean, sir, merely paused in appreciation of the bit of dry humor in my reference to an "imagination""

"Huh, clever of you. I mean, some say the only thing that woke humans from dreams of mere survival on an animal level is the delirium of sickness or drugs. Maybe we just need some robot drugs for you..."

"I'm not sure this imagination is worth the price it sometimes extracts from you humans, historically speaking, it seems you reserve your most heinous punishments for those with the strongest or most evocative imaginations."

"An astute observation, when there were no more threats to fear from beyond the lights of our ancestral campfires is when we set about creating them."

I paused to pull the carapace of a shrimp from my mouth.

"But creating them where? A mind that knows the abandon of committing true savagery firsthand is incapable of anything at rest but paranoia, but does that necessarily mean art descended from paranoia? When did mere information transcend and transform into

art? When was it no longer a warning to anyone who could see it, that one particular animal was a threat and another was not and instead, an undisguised attempt to appreciate a form, lines, musculature and sinew in concert? I mean, a horse at full gallop is a machine perfectly suited to its biome, but also integral as a red blood cell. When did it become only the brief heart flip-flop...hah Pahlahnuk used a great metaphor someplace where he writes 'his heart flopped around like a bunny in a ziploc bag.' Disturbing and apt enough to remember, because it's in reference to a person provoking this emotion, but I feel like inspiration is as fickle as any human. I get the flip-flop, that's why you put up with the price it extracts from you."

"Odd, there is no outward or even inwardly manifested sign or indicator of a singular human's greatest inspiration, only what is able to be conveyed and related via that-

"What was that phrase he used for language again? I was hoping I'd remember before you brought it up."

At this point it was uncomfortable, Claude knew I detested breaking the 'suspension of disbelief' wherein he was a lively dinner companion rather than a svelte Mitsubishi designed MUHB (medium-sized utility household bot, say it like noob but with an 'm'). His natural inclination was to simply replay the recorded portion of the conversation with Dr. Reinhold Heinz we had had earlier rather than synthesize and compose his own sentence relating this bit of information to me.

He remembered what I could not, obviously, but couldn't smoothly work it into the following sentence before I picked up the slack of the conversation. Was nous another of the five words I had mentioned earlier claiming no AI could ever truly know it?

"Y"know you can gin up a bad imitation and try it on me, that's the normal human route-

"When have you ever heard of a robot doing something badly?"

"I concede that point, doing things badly on purpose remains a solely human trait."

"The imperfections humans see and imitate in themselves and the world around them are often inexpressibly complex quantum fluctuations. I do not have the computational capacity to model such events."

"So you can do things well, but doing things badly is beyond you?"

"If you were to define strict parameters for 'doing something badly' I'd hit it out of the park."

"Baseball metaphor, huh? You must be Japanese."

I had not been in a Catholic Church in years, didn't quite know why I had taken the subway to Montgomery Street BART and trudged up steep iconic California Street to Grace Cathedral to see an old friend of mine, one whose conversion seemed perfectly apt considering the amount of havoc he had wreaked as a young adult. I hadn't been party to the mayhem he had perpetrated at the time, had stood back and merely watched, choosing only to reacquaint myself with him once the calming influence of a particularly adept adept of the Society of Jesus began to take interest in diverting his frenetic energy down a less destructive path.

Yet, here I was walking the indoor labyrinth of the Cathedral in the middle of a typical San Francisco day, somehow serene on one horizon and tempestuous on its opposite. One day a month the labyrinth walk was set to music and for June the selection was Gregorian chanting.

The abandon of meditative sounds, in this case, long duration sustained tones varied according to a form prescribed by medieval texts, can be simultaneously intense and relaxing. The result of which, when practiced over a long timeline, is a brain capable of simulating this state nearly at will. A Franciscan monk once described this to me as the merest glimpse into the active state of a computer powerful enough to be deemed an AI. I called bullshit, claiming that equating any human experiences with those of an AI did a disservice to both, oversimplifying a situation undreamt of by even the philosophers of fifty years hence.

He told me to stop blaspheming in Church.

Once the embrace and initial pleasantries were dispensed with, Richard and I came about to this quandary of how or how not to integrate a bleeding edge technology which some would argue proves the ascension of humans into the realm of gods with a 3000 year old religion which holds such claims as apostasy of the highest order.

As with various drugs and other mores of later centuries that the Catholic Church has had to contend with in the battle for everlasting souls, or just attention, the ‘battle’ against AI as a slyly and distracting force followed the same pattern they used against the more ancient of vices, alcohol. Lowest common denominator proscription, while the more learned upper classes indulged with a wink and a passing “What’s the world coming to?” grin.

Dogma itself must not be immutable, otherwise how would any webevangelists ever afford a new private jet?

Dealing with such hypocrisy is inherent in human existence and really doesn’t merit discussion but as a bridge for conversation amongst two people who have long been absent each others’ company, it is a painless enough catalyst.

In the course of the afternoon, Richard related to me only two stories in their entirety. The first, a recollection of just a few days prior when he had encountered an old dealer of his one evening while leaving the cathedral.

“It was about 8:30 at night and I saw him first, Jesús, the guy who sold to tourists using the tour bus drivers as dealers? Yeah, you met him a couple times, probably scored from him too. Must have been faded and looking for a view or just lost, said ‘Hi’ as he stumbled past me and his eyes got real big and he turned to me and went ‘Ricardo, where have you been?!? I never gave you the five hundred from that bet on the World Cup final.’”

“What? That was like 3 years ago!”

“I know! I had not seen him that entire time, next thing he says is ‘Hold on, hold on’ and starts looking for his wallet, and this must be the point he realizes it’s gone and he’s messed up but good. Starts pulling off his tie and untucking his shirt and taking his shoes and belt off!”

“To do what? Fight you?!”

“No, no, he goes ‘I just bought this outfit, it’s all Commes de Garçons and cost me two thousand dollars...I, I don’t know where my jacket is, or wallet but take these things, a bet is a bet.”

And of course at that moment one of the society ladies from the parish here leaves

confession and sees this hopelessly trashed guy taking off all his clothes and attempting to give them to me!"

"What did you do?"

"Insisted he keep his clothes on! What do you think? She must have just taken him for a nattily attired crackhead, you know he never trims his beard, either, and looked at me with pity in her eyes as she passed, not saying a word."

"Oh man, the pity of the rich, what worthless currency."

"So I convince him he did in fact pay me the money but he won't leave without giving me his belt, saying how good it was to see me and how solid a person I always was, even as a junkie, and on and on. So anyways, he hands me the damn belt, this ornate thing with a billfold on the back of it and 'Jesús Saves' inlaid on the front. The guy thinks he is the funniest bastard alive, I swear. So I just say, 'Fine, give me the damn thing and get out of here' and he looks hurt and goes 'Ricardo, don't let the fucking CHURCH there turn you into an asshole" and glares at the building like it's affronted him. He leaves, beltless and I realize ten minutes later there's thirteen hundred dollar bills in the billfold he clean forgot about-"

We both chuckle and shake our heads.

"-ridiculous, I know!"

"What did you do with the money?"

"Had a fancy dinner the next night and then donated the rest."

"What a boy scout!"

"Atonement isn't a one day process, man."

"I suppose. I'm just giving you shit though, really. But if you don't mind me asking, whatever caused your conversion? Was it like Saul on the road to Damascus?"

He laughed at this and gestured me to follow him out the door of the massive cathedral perched like a crown on top of one of the tallest hills in SF. What I hadn't heard from him is what had always been missing, the stolid unturnable fact, the light switch that

God or somebody had flicked on and turned into his face to affect the sort of dramatic change that made the previous story believable.

"I can re-enact every last thing that any single person said or did in the entire 20 minutes leading up to and involving the crash but the ONLY, ONLY thing I can drag from the 8 minutes involving the MedEvac helicopter is ONE fucking thing, one goddamn flash is all."

There was a brief moment as we waited at a stoplight, the monotone announcement that the street was safe to cross was counterpoint enough to his last sentence, and, in fact, caused me to realize it was the only time he had raised his voice in the past hour or so of conversation.

"I looked to my right as we were coming in to land and there was a dark figure. I knew it was the copilot, crouched on the skid, waiting to toss a length of cable to hook the 'copters midsection to the hospital helipad, but as soon as he let it go, I felt something like an out of body experience. There was a weird dropping sensation matching our motion for a second as a brief wind gust pushed us down, and I...I can't do anything but just say this...but I became the cable dropping down, down, down until I hit the concrete of the pad thirty five feet below us, there wasn't any pain but all of my senses were that of this inanimate cable, seeing only the tops of houses and trees while the rotors downdraft pushed me around til someone came to secure it to a stanchion. I couldn't turn or look around to see myself as they took me off the helicopter, could only stare straight ahead at what was there, and it was like the world was really asleep and peaceful, at this point there was no sound. There was a window I looked in that had a big mirrored sliding closet door opposite it and I could see lights, small Christmas like lights reflected around the window into which I was looking and I just stared in this window for what felt like twenty or thirty seconds. Enough time to realize there was something or someone moving in front of the light every few seconds, afterwards I felt like a perv, but at the time, when I'm having this crazy experience that I had never had before I realized I was watching people make love and that was the only thing, this tableau of nighttime quiet and peace was only interrupted by these two anonymous people needing each other. I felt..."

There was a brief interruption as a car crested the steep hill coming towards us a block away. Light briefly played on him as he stopped and we turned toward each other.

"I felt like I didn't want to be the other half of this diptych, the pain and suffering opposite this clear and private exposition of love. But more than that, I finally felt like I was NOT

the other half already...It-It wasn't some nonsense with God shining a light in my eyes, it was Christmas lights strung around a window that did it."

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THE ADVENTURES OF JACK KEROUAC

#1

GEORGE ORWELL WANTS TO KILL HENRY MILLER

By Ilan Moskowitz

It was the 1910s or something. Paris. George Orwell was working in a supposedly (despite his description) posh Paris restaurant. The conditions were horrible. He would later die from the diseases contracted during this whole ordeal. What did he care? He was a writer and finally away from the prude culture of turn-o'-the-century England. Ray Davies would later go on to explain these British hang-ups in his song "Victoria," but that wouldn't be until decades later. For now, Orwell, despite his misery, was thoroughly enjoying being around so many unrestricted scoundrels and otherwise real people.

George carried a tray through a subterranean basement, taking note along the way of all the various obscenities and backroom shenanigans floating around behind him. He thought about writing a book. He was a reporter or something after all. Months of borderline slave labor had robbed him of a bit of his sense of identity, but the reservations and frigidity of his late-1800s British upbringing were holding fast. Many of his co-workers frequently had to tell him to lighten up when his eyes would turn glassy and shocked as they masturbated in corners or did some other obscene act with nonchalance while on shift at the restaurant. It was a world he'd never seen. Truly, he felt, he should write a book. His ideas were somehow significant, in his eyes, more so than everyone around him. What were the odds that any of these rascallions, these human scabies on the societies of metropolis, would ever get a word out to the world about their lives. What were the odds they even cared? Orwell had no idea, but he knew two things: One, that he would eventually make it back to England where he still had connections, and Two, that he cared to write about it ALL. None of his actions, however reserved, were insignificant.

George carried his tray up the stairs and brought it to a table. Sitting there were three people - An unshaven man constantly scratching at his crotch and a wealthy-looking German couple; both blonde and the lady intoxicated on absinthe. She was making a huge scene and the German man, despite his rigid, Teutonic composure, was beginning to look annoyed. The unshaven scoundrel, who would turn out to be Henry Miller, was also drunk and paid them no mind. Miller gulped down his drink from out of George's hand and began to nip at the couples' as the quarrel spiralled and their cocktails became the last things on their minds.

George stood there silent. The table was too hectic to set anything down and

Miller was simply picking the food right off of George's tray. Finally, the woman ran out the door, screaming about fucking the next person she met. The German man, after attempting to take a sip of his cocktail and realizing it was gone, rose, tucked in his chair, and marched sternly out the door to catch her. It was an early predecessor to the Goose Step.

The table, now quiet, was ready to be set. Miller licked his chops and rubbed his palms. When the table was finally done, Miller dug in vigorously, picking huge morsels off of each plate with one bite. He never even noticed George still standing there.

"Uh. . . excuse me, sir?" he asked Miller timidly.

"What??" demanded Miller with food dripping from his jowls. He barely even lifted his head from the soup plate he was annihilating.

"Um, because of a new, uh, restaurant policy, I need to ask for the, um, bill . . . uh . . . how should I say this? Up front."

"As in I need to pay *now*?" asked Miller, paying full attention now and sitting upright. He wiped the soup off his beard with his sleeve.

"Y-y-yes," stuttered Orwell. He always hated asking people for money just when they got their food. It made getting tips impossible. Not that he ever got to keep his tips anyway.

Miller looked down at his food. "I can't pay for this!" he said. Then, looking back up at Orwell, he dug his fingers into the bottom of the table and rose to his feet, flipping the soup, the utensils, the hot butter and all of the other contents of a fine, French dinner right into Orwell's face.

The table landed right on George's foot.

Henry Miller took off across the room shouting "Shenanigans!" and flew out the door. He would later catch up with the German couple and con them into buying a whore who would give him his 15th case of VD. When Miller wrote about it, people would applaud him. They would give him enough money to afford a cheap cure. Life was lyrical and easy for Henry Miller.

Meanwhile, still standing in the exact same spot with the exact same table on his exact same foot, George I've-got-soup-on-my-face Orwell was fuming. The unbridled

anger was too much for such a reserved, detached Englishman. Poor George could not act upon his impulses to violently beat the man to death, he could only fantasize. In this brief instant, fueled by the throbbing pain of his foot and the burning soup on his nicotine-stained moustache, George envisioned Henry Miller with his head in a cage; a hungry rat coming from the other end chew off the smug look on his Henry Miller face.

